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What The Church Means To Me

Wilfred T. Grenfell

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MEMBER DESERVES THE
NAME OF THE "FRIEND
OF ALL THE WORLD"

WHAT HAS THE CHURCH MEANT TO ME? IT HAS MEANT THE AGENCY THROUGH WHICH I RECEIVED SUCH SPIRITUAL SIGHT AS I HAVE · IT HAS MEANT THE BODY THROUGH WHICH HAS COME TO ME STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS MANY TIMES, COMFORT IN TRIAL, HELP IN TIME OF NEED

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A FRANK CONFESSION AND A FRIENDLY ESTIMATE BY AN INSIDER

BY

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No. 1

WHAT THE CHURCH MEANS TO ME

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THE Church to me means all who, consciously or unconsciously, are forwarding God's kingdom on earth. In the broad definition of the Master it means "all those who are not against us." The way in which men associate for worship, or in which they consider it most remunerative to invest their efforts to forward the kingdom, gives them no right to arrogate to themselves the title of God's Church. Any body of men saying, "We are the Church," seems to me ridiculous.

If they try to exclude at the same time those who approach their Maker, or who are endeavoring to do faithfully the things Christ would approve, only in some other way, then they become offensive also. I am firmly convinced the world is coming to this view, and I

am glad it is already beginning to express it. Through "the Church" the salvation of the world must come. I have no use whatever for the critic whose heart is set on her destruction or who muckrakes it for a revenue. By this I mean the Church Invisible, known only to God's Holy Spirit.

Standards which Christ would Condemn

The "offense" of the visible churches that tells most against them today in the minds of educated men is not worldliness or unfaithfulness; it is their inability to shake off their untenable position as judges of others. The "Church" in Jesus' day judged him unfit to live. Upon Luther, Wesley, and many of the best servants of the human race the churches to which they belonged passed similar sentences. Even the suggestion of the "holding-up-of-skirts," of this "I-am-holier-than-thou" attitude, because I think differently, is repellent and has not yet met the fate that certainly awaits it, before there can be

a reign of universal peace. Science has taught us that doubt, quite as much as faith, leads to the apprehension of truth. There are countless men, skilled in the exact sciences and in scholarship, possessed of wealth and rank, who find it impossible to define their position in words, yet whose humility and charity make us love them, whose deeds are just such as those which have come down the ages as Jesus' own selection for the most convincing evidence of his Sonship of God. We all know today men of inferior attainments and lives who not only know themselves to be infallible, but haven't the grace to leave even such men alone, and who have interpreted their call to the "ministry" as simply a mandate to set every one else intellectually right. I know that that which is hidden from the wise can be revealed to babes, and that our talents — namely, social position, wealth, and brains — merely enlarge in God's sight our capacity for service, and therefore our responsibility. But I know also that the prizes of our high calling can be purchased only by our fidelity in

following, and that involves other than intellectual processes.

The Case of the Working Man

As for the working man, to my mind if he doesn't join a visible church today it is simply because he doesn't see any good in it. The teachings of the Church's Master still appeal to him, but the churches to him don't stand for them. He has seen the visible churches, organized to perpetuate Christ's teaching, striving for centuries only after privilege, patronage, and political power. Was ever such a topsy-turvyism? Instead of being a bridge over the great gulf between wealth and poverty, the Church still savors to him too much of the "be content where you are" sentiment. To him she is insincere, and consequently his pew is empty. He doesn't want an insurance agency only for the next world; he wants a kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace, first in this world, where Christ intended it to be, as well as in the next. Church authority can no longer compel his interest; she cannot compete as

a popular entertainer; only the proof of her unselfish love in matters of everyday life can save her from becoming a useless hulk, stranded on the beach of time. Rainsford, Stelzle, and others have shown that the downtown churches need not close if the message is given in Christ's own undeniable way which the people can't misunderstand.

Though I do see the various churches just beginning to rouse themselves — no longer wholly absorbed in making every one say "shibboleth" with an "h," still just as in politics the party machine becomes God, crushing truth and righteousness before it, so the church machine is only too often a Juggernaut's car, destroying all faith in God and man. The machine has usurped the pedestal of Christ, as in Rome and Russia, and nearer home, if Judge Lindsey of Denver is to be believed. For there the very clergy of 145 out of 150 churches refused to come out boldly against dives and brothels that were defiling the girls and boys of the city of Denver, because they dared not endanger the interests of their machine.

Vox populi was right. They were presumably afraid to take up the cross, which real fighting the devil involves as much today as it did in Judea centuries ago. Many, outside all churches, support hospitals, orphanages, soup kitchens, relief funds, and so forth. Big corporations and even heathen armies on the war path support Y. M. C. A. work, because that is a demonstratively valuable working factor. The church which is afraid of offending rich members cannot have a faith in God which is worth anything.

Thank God for all the illustrations of her direct watchful vitality that she does show. As, for instance, when the Christian Endeavorers fought the question of prize-fight moving-picture shows and won out — or when a Parkhurst fought bravely for a clean police force. Even if the world today does not vex itself so much as formerly about predestination, original sin, the "actual presence," or even the correct mental attitude to insure heaven hereafter, the churches may surely count it as a product of their work that the people *do*

trust God more simply for the past and future, and are more in earnest about securing justice for the downtrodden and the square deal in the present. In this they need as much as ever the Church's leading.

What Makes the Church Attractive

That which attracts to a church today is not higher criticism, elaborate ritual, hair-splitting creeds, but fearless fighting for public health, for good government, for righteous labor conditions, for clean courts of justice. It was the leader of a darky revival who, when asked why he didn't *sometimes* read the Old Testament, replied: "No, sah. Dem commandments just upset de whol' revival." There is no need that taking up politics and social questions should exclude the preaching of the Christ. Men will follow today a Kingsley and a Maurice, a Lincoln, a Beecher, a Brooks, or a Worcester as they will a Heney, a Hughes, or a Folk or any man in whom they see plainly

reflected the unselfish love of the Christ.

Who cares, as a matter of fact, which way these men said their prayers? They may have been Catholic or Protestant, or in honest doubt, but we love them and will follow them. To us they stand for real love to man, and so real faith in God; for true pluck and willingness to take up their cross. Oh, if every member of the churches and every wearer of "the cloth" realized the privilege of standing by every uplifting effort, and was always so valiant for truth as to make a Rueff or any agent of the devil occasionally think it worth while to take the risk of trying to kill them—as in the case of this same Lincoln, of Heney, of Lindsey, and of the Master—the world would recognize then that the Church *was* worth while, and there would be no discussing whether it was going to die out or not. A little physical shooting wouldn't hurt the Church. The world wants a Church Militant, not a backboneless intellectualism. Only the "great Church victorious" can be the "Church at rest."

Nowhere is this fact more unanswerably demonstrated than in the missionary field. Faithlessness in this respect and fearfulness of expenditure, both of men and money in missionary work, have always stood in any church for choked channels of spiritual power, and subsequently spelled anæmia, atrophy, and death. Constant metabolism is as essential for spiritual life as physical. A church must die that doesn't use up and give out energy as surely as a physical body. The period of latent physical life is not long. God in his mercy has seemed to prolong latent spiritual life almost unduly in the case of some churches. Those who love the Church are breathing a little more freely because of the Laymen's Missionary Movement.

Lack of Clearness

To me personally it is hard to know exactly what the Church has meant; it is hard to "know one's self." The attitude of practically all men's minds is to excuse their own shortcomings by attributing the cause elsewhere. Thus

Paddy blames the Government for the hole in his trousers, just as he does for the typhoid resulting from the dump heap in front of his own door. When I first essayed to write on this subject, I several times tore up the manuscript, feeling that I had written that which was calculated to rend her at whose breast my own spirit had first found life-giving sustenance and afterwards wisdom, encouragement, and aid.

Yet history seems plainly to show that there have been times when the world would have been more Christian if the organizations to which men often limit the name of church had ceased to exist. I presume the experience we have all had with organizations calling themselves "the Church" has driven us, at times at least, to the same conclusions in our own day about those particular branches. But this bears no reference to the body of men who love Christ better than their own lives. They are really the Church, and mean everything to me, to the world outside, and to all aspirants to the dignity of the name of Christian.

Organizations Essential

The visible Church stands to me above all else as appointed of God for all that organization means in the attainment of any other object. Atmospheric religion is desirable, but to progress, to permanence, organization is essential. Moreover, being conscious of the idiosyncrasy of the human mind, I have every use for the various communions if no man is to be excluded.

But I look on one and all simply as a means to an end, and as agencies, not entities. Theoretically there is no reason why they should not love one another. Alas! they haven't always done so. A large membership of ineffective persons may be only an incubus. Like sailors on my vessel, if they are incompetent they are a hindrance, and in every way expensive and undesirable. I never care to emphasize the large number that the crew of my hospital ship consists of. As long as I can do the work I take pride in the small number I can handle it with. It is far better for the individuals themselves to have

more responsibility and see clearly the result of their own handiwork. They feel also, then, that it is more important to be ready at all calls, and when at it they will work far more keenly. History proves that when Constantine filled the Eastern Church with nominal Christians he led directly to its downfall. Yet one of the most difficult things I have had to learn is that religious people find it impossible to believe that others do not care one iota whether a man is labeled a Methodist or an Episcopalian. I certainly do not, and I do not believe God does.

Christ Counts, not Creeds

I sat in a small, mean little cabin on our coast some time ago while a trained nurse from New York washed a sick baby and taught the mother how to save the poor little mite's life. It was that gentlewoman's ministry for Jesus Christ. For the privilege she was paying her own expenses and receiving no salary. If ever I realized the Master standing by in my life it was then and there in the semi-darkness of that hut.

That kind of ministry never fails to grip the laboring man. An hour later, as I spoke to a preacher about this angel of mercy, he said, "Yes, but it is a pity she is a Roman Catholic." Yes, it is hard, this faith in Jesus Christ. It will bring her no praise of men. Yet it was such sermons as this nurse's that Jesus thought it worth while wasting his time on, when the world lacked theology far more than it does today. Those sermons of his in their modest settings have been the most brilliant of the world's possessions ever since. I think the Church grades her preachers wrongly. There is no failure of Christ's aims. His message is bearing fruit in the hearts of many men whom the-necessary-to-define-your-mental-attitude school would rule out of the kingdom. Even Elijah made a mistake in the matter of how many servants God had.

Usefulness the Supreme Test

These divisions of the Church mean to me cargo vessels, and if for any reason they can't carry, they should go

out of commission. If one is beyond repair or the type has been superseded, it should go out permanently. We continue to run old three-deckers for fighting battles, or Columbian caravels for freighting purposes. It appears to some to cause a temporary setback to fighting efficiency to send a once serviceable ship to the scrap heap, but it is the best and cheapest in the end. In the North Sea fishery I saw hundreds of sailing craft that had helped to make fortunes, that had kept the markets full, and that still had years of life, laid up, and then sold practically for old junk. Why? Simply because swift steam-trawlers had been found to do the work better.

These sub-organizations, as far as I am concerned, are existing merely to help men to work in the spiritual field. They are not like some yachts, just to carry bunting and paint to be admired. As for church affiliation, what I like to see is a hungry man going where he will be fed and get strength. I trust it does not seem flippant to say that I look on all church organizations in the same way, and that the tradition of a

long past suggests to me the inefficiency of a dotage, quite as much as the stimulating aroma of potency which, as in the case of some wines, can only be acquired by the lapse of time. Some will say that this Modernism has no sense of obligation, no sense of veneration, makes no allowance for the idiosyncrasies of others. Well, that may be so. I may plead, on the contrary, that what we call the ancient Church was the youthful Church. The Church of the twentieth century is the ancient, grown-up Church.

The Building Itself, Pro and Con

Experience has convinced me that bricks and mortar and sectarian loyalty have more often been hindrances than helps to that expression of faith in him which Jesus looks for in our lives. I admit I have not lived long enough in one place fully to appreciate the possibilities for stimulus and help this tying up into bundles can afford. On the other hand, I feel so certain that buildings set aside for public worship are essential in every place, that where

none exists I feel wretched, and I have shares in quite a number all along our Labrador coast.

I love to wander through an ancient edifice in which generations of men have come and worshiped and found help and comfort. I like looking at the Viking ship, but I don't want to cross the Atlantic in it. Personally, I like to hear, to see, and to understand. The dim religious light and sonorous sounds do not waken me to a keener sense of the call of God to be up and doing. They just make me sleepy. Besides being difficult as a rule to hear, there is too much around to distract my attention. I don't think Westminster Abbey helps me personally to attend to the service. On the contrary, I think it makes me think of the building. I used somehow to imagine that service in the open air was necessarily associated with cant. Now I like it far the best. Not merely because it is more sanitary — till some one learns how to ventilate a building decently — but because it absolutely forces you to feel insignificant, and anxious that

the great Creator should condescend to care about a mosquito like you. Moreover, I have often noticed out in the open a unity between those of different sects that was perfectly delightful. Meanwhile I am not unmindful that in many, if not in all, a deep inborn spiritual craving, no child of philosophy, is a powerful factor in helping men Godward. Also that many find their only help in authority and the faith of others. All these the Church has to provide for. It is no easy task to be prophet and conservative custodian at the same time.

The New and Better Spirit

One great trouble with tying one's self to any one church, from my peripatetic point of view, has always been the fact that so many other churches say, "If you are not one of us, you are against us." It is almost too personal to illustrate this from my own somewhat sad experience in my early days, but every worker in wide fields must have felt it. Jesus had specially to rebuke his own disciples for forbidding *any*

man from casting out devils. For whatever his opinions, he must be on our side.

Thank God there is a new spirit entering the churches, a larger spirit! Only those can survive eventually who cultivate it. A spirit that wants to use every effort to raise humanity, and seeks a return for its outstretched hand, solely in the fact that it thereby grasps more of those of "his brethren."

The Only Right Way to Grow

This is the way for a church to grow. The more it exercises its muscles in pulling men out of their pits, the more dexterous, powerful, and altogether desirable it will be, because the world will need it, and it will no longer appeal only to those who prefer its form of worship or have a bias towards its particular church polity. The law of demand and supply should be recognized as applying equally to the church as to other agencies. The desire to be needed, to find work, and not merely to be a big party product can alone develop communions able to remove

the stigma of being either parasites or fads.

If a church is really anxious to fulfil its functions as set down in the only book of instructions for each of them; if it wants to call forth latent energy, as a Washington from his homestead, or a Lincoln from his farm, it must cease to lay stress on orthodoxy and get to work where the world really needs it. A surgeon may be ever so correct in his knowledge of operative surgery, but he must find a practise or he is useless. It is not so much for holding services, as for rendering services, that the world is looking to the Church today.

Human Need the True Objective

Today the Church should not only have a message for the strong and well. In Christ's day it had a message for the sick and suffering also. I admit that the medical profession has neglected too much the influence that mind has over matter. It therefore frequently endeavors to treat a human being as if he was nothing but a conglomeration

of material cells. But the Church, it seems to me, is making an infinitely more serious mistake in entirely abandoning the valuable aid it can give the physician when he has found that no organic cause accounts for the symptoms of his patient. What is known in America as the Emmanuel Movement has my entire sympathy. It is an honest effort of sane men to bring to the aid of physical sufferers demonstratively valuable spiritual influences.

The Minister only a Servant

The priest or minister is the navigating lieutenant of the Church ship. He is the tactician of the army. He is the specialist whose experience is invaluable. He is not called to be one whit holier than I am, but being on a lofty pedestal he will possibly be more closely watched. His, indeed, is a pitiable condition if he has not the spirit of his Master. His creed may seem infallible, his faith most orthodox, but for my part I would rather not be so sure of what I did believe, and pray with "the man after God's own heart,"

"Teach me to *do* the thing which pleases thee." This is a sure step on the road to the answer of, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." I am convinced there would be no lack of worthy candidates for the ministry if only the churches would lay more stress on the infinite privilege of human service it opens up. There are more medical students than are needed.

The Futility of the Intellectual Test

Is it then a necessity, or an advisable thing, that before a man can become a worker with the Church he must pass an intellectual test? Is it imperative for him to find exactly what he does not believe? That makes it almost impossible for him to get back afterwards. The effect on the unfortunate heathen of warring messengers, all calling for different faith tests for membership in Christ's Church, has always seemed to me little short of disastrous. The theory of Christianity wouldn't convince the heathen of the Congo

that religion is desirable, or make a Russian Jew wish to adopt Russian Christianity. The same applies to the Turkish views of Austrian Christianity, or the attitude of the Indian of South America towards Christian Spain. As for me, I am satisfied in my own work, and I think my Master was, with the faith that makes a man anxious and willing to come and help me, ever believing that he that is not against us is on our side.

Joshua, a servant of God if ever there was one, is often quoted as saying, "Decide," "Choose." We must remember that what he said was, "Choose whom you will *serve*," not what your final belief is going to be. Christ never sought for admirers, but for followers. The most voluble protestants of their faith in Jesus as God's Son were devils. They knew it, but benefited little by it. Thank God, Jesus never made the opposite of confessing our belief in him before men to be the non-apprehension of his divinity, but always the denying and being ashamed of his service and becoming a stumbling block.

Though I know what a wonderful thing it is, as a source of power, to be able to confess our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and what infinite peace it affords to have that confirmed by experience.

The shrewd judgment of Wall Street would not lend a man ten cents because he had been accepted as a member of a church on confession of faith. Often enough members of the same church wouldn't either, although they probably both would to a doer, like Livingstone. So let us abandon the creed-judging of others. Jesus accepted the following of the adulterers, publicans, and the harlots, and the man who has honest doubts may be a Christ follower or a Christian, who ever says the contrary.

Banded together for Manly Service

I have always loved to think of Jesus Christ and to commend him as Master because he accepted all who came — whether for comfort, for help, or for service. When a man sets to work on

the road that leads to heaven here, he will be tasting the sweetness of the believing that involves everlasting life. In our Labrador work we form no church. Our fellow-workers pray and worship in every denomination as the bias of their mind and temperament leads them to find peace and comfort and strength best. Yet we are a definite body associated together for certain purposes. These we believe are translations into action of our interpretation of our debt to God and to our neighbor. In that sense are we not a true ecclesia?

Will it horrify my readers if I confess I have accepted doctors for our hospitals, nurses for our districts, and workers of every type, and yet have never known which way they prefer to worship? Nor have I ever played the censor on their right to help us by defining what they ought to believe before I allowed them to set to work. Before a member joins the permanent staff we must know he is in absolute sympathy with our aim to glorify God and serve our brother, and that he or she

is willing to give their best for that object. But that is all. I am fearless to confess that I would enroll for a colleague in the clinics, which hold in their hands the lives of my friends, a man who is *facile princeps* in the art of surgery rather than a second-rate surgeon who can subscribe to the very same intellectual tenets as I do myself.

Our claim to be capable servants of our Master and reincarnations of his life is judged in our little world by the good work we do; if as surgeons or nurses, by our skill; if as storekeepers and labor employers, by the clean deals we give. If we are second-rate in our work all our talking won't persuade men of our fitness for our position. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum* — and to my mind God seeks first men diligent in business, fervent in spirit, *serving* the Lord.

All the sects have only the same work for the same Master to accomplish; it is through being fellow-workers and not identical thinkers that love for all who love Christ must come. This is unity. The *camaraderie* of a fighting force is

not disturbed by the feeling that one is of the cavalry, another of the infantry, a third of the artillery; or even, as has often been shown in warfare, whether they are of different races, climes, or temperaments. There is nothing like common work to beget intelligent love for your fellow.

How did Christ admit his members? By their profession of faith? I think not. By their readiness to work? Yes. Those were workers he chose, every one of them. Did he wait until they could say they believed, even that he was God's Son, before he sent them out to work? Not at all. He said if you are willing to go out and work you will get faith by working and seeing others work.

In this way most men get faith now. The empirical method is the very best way to get it firmly rooted. *Experientia docet.* "Now we believe, not because of what you say, but because we have seen for ourselves." Did not Judas work with Jesus? Yet it is absurd to contend that Jesus was "unequally yoked with unbelievers" on

that account. At the end of Christ's life only Peter seemed even to guess who he was, and his protestations were not even the asset he thought they were. For a few minutes after he had openly, to Christ's face and before witnesses, asserted his faith, Christ called him "Satan" and told him to get behind him. When he was in trouble they every one ran away. They would never have done that from a handful of soldiers if they had honestly believed he was the very Son of God.

To sum up, What has the Church meant to me? It has meant the agency through which I received such spiritual sight as I have. It has meant the body through which has come to me strength in weakness many times, comfort in trial, help in time of need. Through the Church of God, which Phillips Brooks said is "the kingdom of good hearts united in love," have come the talents to use in the work to which my life is given. When I want more help it is to this wide Church I go to look for it, and I have never looked in vain.

As a man loves the members of his family, so I love the Church of God. For resources it stands to me as a permanent war office stands to an army in the field. Fine uniforms and titles are of little moment as compared with wisdom and efficiency for supplying men and sinews for war. We fully value the great leaders in our home country, and we also love our "Bobs" or our "Wellington" *because* when called on *they are willing to march in the front rank themselves.*

As a peripatetic worker myself during open water in my little hospital ship, and in winter with dogs and sleigh, I recognize that it is but transient help which I can give alone. So I love the little hospitals, which speak of permanence. When a call for help comes for me, often enough my place is vacant. But the cheery haven of refuge is *always* there.

The grip of fellowship the visible churches give us on our homeland visits is a real factor in our work. It makes them real sharers in it. And I thank God for the real Church of God. I

realize as never before how essential *that* is. Besides all this, she stands as a great reminder of God to the world. "Lest we forget. Lest we forget."

My last is purely a private confession, and it is this: If it were only through association, I love also that organization within God's Church of which I am myself a humble member. It is *because* I love it I am willing to write exactly as I feel. For I love it enough to wish with all my heart and soul and strength that God might be able to use it to a fuller capacity, as with open eyes and unprejudiced heart and with wisdom developing by experience it becomes willing to see that IT also must have its scrap heap, or its museum for honorable antiquities, on which to lay aside the weights that are impeding it in the race, which are crippling its usefulness, and which are bound eventually to destroy it if it blindly continues to cling to them.

The qualification for life eternal is to have done well. The final test is to be ethical, not theological. I expect to find more roads leading into the Golden

City than many seem even to wish for. After the school day of life I look for an ecclesia, a mighty host, called out for more perfect service. My ideal church is characterized solely by the very simplest interpretation of the old, old story, and each member deserves the name of the "friend of all the world."

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